



**WOMEN
IN AUTOMOTIVE**



**automotive
employment**



Hiring for Gender Diversity



A practical guide for New Zealand automotive industry employers and their recruitment partners to attract, assess, and hire more women.

17%

of NZ automotive workforce are women

39%

more likely to outperform competitors vs. non gender diverse companies*
(*McKinsey 2023)

Dual Decision Maker

in household vehicle purchase decisions
(NielsenIQ)

This guide is a member resource produced by Women in Automotive New Zealand with support from Automotive Employment New Zealand. Designed for leaders and managers in the automotive industry, automotive business owners, talent acquisition and HR teams, and the recruitment agencies they partner with.

“Choosing the best person for the job should always remain the priority. However, organisations that are intentional about how they attract, assess and select talent can access a wider and more diverse pool of high-quality candidates. By applying consistent assessment criteria and reducing the impact of unconscious bias, employers can ensure candidates are evaluated on their capability and potential. Following recruitment best practice doesn’t compromise quality, it strengthens it, while helping increase the participation of women in the automotive sector.”

Russell Phillips, Managing Director - Automotive Employment New Zealand.

Research and insight sources, and further reading can be found in the appendix.



01 Why This Matters

The New Zealand automotive industry has one of the most significant gender imbalances of any sector in the country. According to workforce analysis by MITO in conjunction with Infometrics New Zealand, women represent just 17% of the automotive workforce heavily concentrated in administrative and customer service roles, while technical, retail sales, and leadership positions remain overwhelmingly male. In collision repair women represent just 6%. This is not a pipeline problem. It is a systemic attraction and retention problem, and it is within every employer's power to address.

Organisations that have actively addressed gender diversity are seeing measurable returns: higher customer satisfaction scores, stronger employee retention, and better financial outcomes. This is not about quotas or political obligation, it is about building the most capable team possible.

Business Impact	Evidence
Customer experience	Women purchase 44.1% of the cars in New Zealand and heavily influence 85% of all vehicle purchasing decisions in their homes*. International dealership review data has shown female sales consultants outperforming male peers in areas of customer satisfaction, respectfulness, and understanding customer needs.** (*moneyhub August 2024, **dealerelite.net)
Staff retention	Research from Diversity Works NZ and global studies indicates inclusive, diverse workplaces tend to experience stronger engagement and lower employee turnover. Studies show that visible female leaders and sponsors can materially improve women's sense of belonging, career ambition, progression, and likelihood of staying in male-dominated industries*. (*Springer research journal, female leader role models)
Financial performance	McKinsey's Diversity Wins report (2023) found companies in the top gender-diversity quartile are 39% more likely to financially outperform their sector peers.
Talent pool	New Zealand faces critical shortages in automotive technician and sales roles. Ensuring women are fully engaged in the sector presents an opportunity to significantly broaden the available talent pool in a constrained labour market.



02 Rewriting Your Job Advertisements

Research consistently shows that the language used in job advertisements is one of the most powerful filters in recruitment, and most automotive job ads inadvertently exclude women before a single application is received. This is not about lowering standards. It is about removing unnecessary linguistic barriers that cause qualified women to self-select out.

The Evidence Behind Language

A landmark peer-reviewed study by Gaucher, Friesen & Kay (Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 2011) found that advertisements using masculine-coded words such as dominate, competitive, aggressive, driven and tackle attracted significantly fewer female applicants, even when women were equally qualified. Critically, the same study found men were unaffected by feminine-coded language. Writing more inclusive ads does not cost you male applicants. It only gains you female ones.

EXAMPLE: Sales Role — Job Ad Language

BEFORE

We are looking for a **competitive, high-performing sales gun** to **dominate** our new car floor. You will **aggressively pursue** targets and **crush** the competition. Must be a **self-starter** who can **hit the ground running**.

AFTER

We are looking for a **motivated, customer-focused sales professional** who builds genuine relationships and consistently achieves results. You will manage your own pipeline, collaborate with a supportive team, and grow your career with us.

The Confidence Gap: Requirements Lists

Studies show women apply for roles when they meet approximately 100% of stated requirements. Men apply when they meet around 60%* (*Hewlett-Packard internal research, widely replicated). Every unnecessary requirement is a filter that removes women from your funnel:

- **Make the distinction explicit.** Separate 'Essential Requirements' from 'Preferred / Nice to Have.' If a requirement is truly preferred, say so clearly.

- **Cut vanity requirements.** ‘5 years automotive experience’ for a service advisor role. Challenge whether that is really necessary, or could someone with strong customer service experience from another sector be trained into it?
- **Remove credential inflation.** Question every credential: a full driver’s licence for a finance role; a degree for workshop administration. If it doesn’t predict job performance, remove it.
- **Add an explicit invitation.** Include: ‘We welcome applications from candidates who may not meet every requirement. If you are passionate about this field and bring transferable skills, we encourage you to apply.’

Free Tool: Use a Gender Decoder Before Publishing Any Ad

Run every job advertisement through a gender decoder before it is posted. These free tools (gender-decoder.katmatfield.com or Textio) analyse your language and flag masculine or feminine-coded words instantly.

Aim for neutral language. If your ad scores as masculine-coded, revise before publishing. This takes less than five minutes and has been shown to increase female applications by up to 29%.*
(*Gaucher, Friesen and Kay 2011)

Where and How You Advertise

Women and men use different channels and different industry filters to find jobs. If you are only advertising on Seek with a generic listing, you are missing a significant portion of the female candidate pool:

Channel	Why It Works	How to Use It
LinkedIn	Higher proportion of professional women actively networking. Allows targeted job promotion.	Sponsor posts targeted at women in relevant fields. Ask female staff to share roles. Ask Women in Automotive NZ to share on their page. If you have joined the Accord, actively highlight that you are a Women in Automotive Accord Member organisation. Post from your company page, not just portals.
Complimentary industry groups	Facebook groups and trade organisations.	Engage authentically before posting. Sponsor events. Build presence so your post feels warm, not cold.
Employee referral	A powerful channel, but only effective if you already have diverse staff to refer diverse candidates.	Ask female staff specifically to refer women in their network. Offer referral bonuses for successful hires.
Polytechnic partnerships	Access women entering the industry fresh, before competitors.	Sponsor automotive programmes. Offer cadetships and part-time roles to students.



03 Working With Your Recruitment Agency

Many dealerships and automotive businesses outsource some or all of their hiring to recruitment agencies. Where external support is used, businesses should consider specialist partners such as Women in Automotive Accord member organisation Automotive Employment who understand the sector and its talent needs. This is not a reason to step back from diversity outcomes, it is an opportunity to strengthen them. Whomever you work with, the brief you give your recruiter will strongly influence the shortlist you receive.

The Brief: What to be specific on from the beginning

Most gender diversity failures in recruitment happen in the brief. Employers describe roles using shorthand ('we want someone like Mark, but more effective at follow-up') that communicates inherent bias without intending to. Be deliberate:

State gender diversity as an explicit goal

Tell the recruiter directly: 'We are actively working to increase gender diversity in this team, and we would like to see women represented on every shortlist.' Put it in writing. Recruiters who know this is a priority will source differently.

Specify a diverse shortlist requirement

Request that at least 50% of shortlisted candidates are women. Work collaboratively with your recruiter on the sourcing strategy, and don't accept a male-only shortlist.

Challenge the 'standard' profile

If presented with a candidate list that includes solely those with automotive experience, ask: 'Who are we excluding with that filter?' Push to expand to adjacent industries like retail, financial services, hospitality, real estate and insurance. Many skills transfer directly, and women from those industries can make exceptional automotive hires.

Ask about sourcing methods

Ask specifically: 'How will you actively source female candidates for this role?' A good recruiter should describe direct outreach to passive candidates on LinkedIn, and engagement with Women in Automotive NZ networks. Generic Seek advertising alone is not sufficient.

Audit language

Ask to review the job advertisement the recruiter intends to use. Run it through a gender decoder.

Questions to Ask Any Recruitment Agency Before Engaging

1. Do you have experience placing women in technical, sales or leadership roles in male-dominated industries?
2. What proactive sourcing strategies do you use to find female candidates who may not be actively job-seeking?
3. Can you talk through an example of a diverse shortlist you have recently produced?
4. Are any of your own consultants' women with personal networks in the automotive sector?



Evaluating Your Recruitment Performance on Diversity

Track data. At the end of every recruitment campaign and annually within your business, ensure you review:

- What percentage of applications were from women?
- What percentage of the shortlist were women?
- What percentage of interview invitations went to women?
- What percentage of offers went to women?
- Where in the funnel did women drop out and why?

If women are appearing in applications but not making shortlists, there may be a bias in the screening process. If they're making shortlists but not getting interviews, hiring managers may need training. If they're being interviewed but not offered roles, evaluation criteria or the make-up of the interview panel might need review. The data will tell you exactly where to focus.



04 The Interview Process: Removing Structural Bias

Getting women to apply is only half the battle. The interview process itself contains well-documented bias traps that can systematically disadvantage female candidates if left unchecked often without any conscious intent from the interviewers. Structured interviews are not just more equitable; they are proven to be more predictive of actual job performance.

Structured vs Unstructured Interviews

Unstructured interviews, where different candidates are asked different questions based on conversational flow, are the default in many New Zealand organisations hiring practices. They feel natural but can be unintentionally deeply biased. Research by Schmidt & Hunter (1998, Psychological Bulletin) found structured interviews have nearly twice the predictive validity of unstructured ones, and they significantly reduce affinity bias (the tendency to hire people who remind you of yourself).

Unstructured (Common Practice)	Structured (Best Practice)
Different questions asked of each candidate	Same questions asked of every candidate, in the same order
Conversational, follows ad hoc rhythm	Disciplined, stays on defined competencies
Scoring is post-hoc and impression-based	Each response scored against a defined rubric immediately after
Often dominated by affinity bias ('I just liked them')	Affinity bias significantly reduced through consistent scoring
Panel composition is incidental	Panel is deliberately diverse, always includes at least one woman and one male when interviewing both male and female candidates

Interview Questions That Predict Performance

Behavioural questions ('Tell me about a time when...') asks candidates to demonstrate past behaviour, which is often the strongest predictor of future performance. Use these as a starting point for common automotive roles:

Role	Strong Behavioural Question
Sales Consultant	Tell me about a time you built a relationship with a customer who was initially resistant or cautious. What approach did you take and what was the result?
Service Advisor	Describe a situation where you had to manage a customer who was upset about an unexpected cost. How did you handle it?
Parts / Trade	Give me an example of when you had to manage competing priorities with tight deadlines. How did you organise yourself?
Finance & Insurance	Tell me about a time you explained a complex financial product to someone who found it confusing. How did you make it accessible?
Workshop / Technician	Describe a fault diagnosis that took longer than expected. Walk me through your troubleshooting process.
Management	Tell me about a time you identified that someone on your team was underperforming. What steps did you take and what was the outcome?

Unlawful Interview Questions. Know the Boundaries

Under the New Zealand Human Rights Act 1993 and Employment Relations Act 2000, it is unlawful to ask questions (directly or indirectly) relating to protected grounds including sex, marital status, family status, and age. Many automotive interviewers ask these questions casually, but they expose the business to personal grievance claims and cause women to withdraw from processes.

Never Ask	Why It's Unlawful	Ask This Instead
Do you have children / plan to have children?	Unlawful under NZ Human Rights Act family status discrimination. Implies commitment concerns that disproportionately affect women.	This role requires occasional weekend work. Is that something you can accommodate?
Are you married / what does your partner do?	Marital status discrimination. Irrelevant to ability to perform the role.	Simply don't ask, it has no bearing on job performance.
How old are you?	Age discrimination under NZ Human Rights Act.	Focus on competencies and experience demonstrated, not age.
Where are you originally from?	Ethnic and national origin discrimination.	If work rights are relevant: Are you legally entitled to work in New Zealand?



05 Your Employer Brand: What Women See Before They Apply

Before a woman applies for a role at your business, she has often already formed an impression of your culture. She may have visited your website, looked at your social media, read your Google reviews, or viewed your LinkedIn company page. If every face in every photo is male, if there are no women represented on your leadership team page, or if your channels never speak to support, flexibility or career development, she may make assumptions about what it would be like to work there and decide it may not be the right fit.

Your employer brand is shaping perceptions every day, whether it is being intentionally managed or not. Leverage the below Employer Brand Audit. A good best practice is to conduct this audit quarterly. Assign a team member to own it:

Website imagery	Count the photos that include women in non-administrative roles. If the ratio is below 30%, commission a photography day. Authentic images of your actual female staff outperform stock photography every time.
Leadership / team page	If your leadership team page is entirely male, consider whether that reflects genuine current reality or whether female leaders are being omitted.
Social media	Review your last 20 posts. How many feature or tag female staff? Do you share content that signals values alignment with women, family-friendly policies, flexible arrangements, career development stories? Do you actively share Women in Automotive NZ news and events?
Job advertisement tone	Read your live ads as if you are a woman who has never worked in automotive. Does the language invite or exclude? Does it describe culture, flexibility, and development opportunities or just a list of requirements?
Google and Seek reviews	Women often research employers on Seek Company Reviews and Google before applying. What are these reviews saying about your culture. Respond professionally to negative reviews.
Flex and benefits visibility	If you offer flexible hours, parental leave, or career development support, state them prominently in job ads. Don't make candidates ask as that can create a barrier.

The 'Would I Apply Here?' Test

Ask your female employees or the team at Women in Automotive New Zealand to review your career page and last three job ads without being told what you are looking for.

Ask them: 'Based on this, would you apply for a job here? What would make you hesitate?' Their answers will be valuable in continual optimisation.



06 Flexible Work and Role Design

One of the most significant barriers to women applying for automotive roles is that the industry has historically structured roles around six-day trading weeks, rigid rosters, and an unspoken norm that ambition means maximum availability. In a sector facing critical talent shortages, innovative thinking around redesigning these structural rigidities can be an employer brand advantage.

Practical Flexibility for an Industry That Trades Weekends

Flexibility does not mean giving everyone Saturdays off. It means designing roles and rosters thoughtfully so that skilled people with lives outside work (men and women) can still perform at the highest level:

- **Compressed weeks** (4 x 10-hour days) allow a weekday off without reducing total hours is highly valued by parents and caregivers.
- **Staggered start/finish times** (e.g. 7:30am – 4:00pm or 10:00am – 6:30pm) helps both parents accommodate school drop-offs and pickups without affecting coverage.
- **Job-sharing for part-time senior roles** — two people sharing one management position has been successfully trialled in automotive groups in New Zealand, allowing businesses to retain experienced talent that would otherwise leave the industry.
- **Remote administration** for roles with significant non-customer-facing components, particularly relevant for finance, marketing, and back-office roles in multi-site dealer groups.
- **Return-to-work programmes** for parents re-entering after parental leave, with structured onboarding back to full hours over 8 –12 weeks.

EXAMPLE: Service Advisor Roster — Rethinking the Default

BEFORE

Old default: 7:30am – 5:30pm Monday – Saturday. One day off mid-week. Presented as non-negotiable. No part-time pathway. Result: only candidates without significant caregiving responsibilities can realistically take this role.

AFTER

Redesigned: Core roster options offered at application stage (e.g. Compressed week, standard or staggered start/finish). All offer identical career pathway. Result: significantly increased female applicant numbers in NZ dealer group pilots.



Parental Leave: Saying It Out Loud

New Zealand's Parental Leave and Employment Protection Act 1987 (as amended) provides baseline entitlements. If your business offers arrangements beyond the legal minimum, say so in job advertisements. Many automotive businesses quietly offer additional support but never mention it and female candidates assume the worst. Stating 'We support working parents with flexible arrangements and [X] weeks employer-paid parental leave' is a powerful differentiator in a sector where this is rarely communicated. Consider joining other New Zealand automotive organisations who publicly display their parental leave policy on the national Go Crayon register ([The New Zealand Parental Leave Register | Crayon](#))



07 Beyond the Hire: Retention Is the Other Half of the Equation

Attracting women into a business is only part of the equation; retention is the real test of inclusion. Where women leave within 24 months, it's worth examining whether the environment is enabling long-term growth. Without that, investment in attraction alone risks becoming a costly revolving door that also impacts employer brand and team morale.

Why Women Leave New Zealand Automotive Businesses

Reason	What It Looks Like	What To Do
No visible career pathway	No women in senior roles to aspire to. Promotions seen as going to men by default.	Actively sponsor high-performing women. Make succession planning gender-conscious. Consider a networking group of women in the organisation.
Exclusionary culture	Banter and 'locker room' language tolerated. Women excluded from informal networks and social events.	Set explicit behavioural standards. Include women in mentoring and social activities. Look to identify informal 'boys club' social groups.
Pay inequity	Discovering male colleagues earn more for equivalent work. Commission structures that disadvantage part-time workers.	Conduct a gender pay audit annually. Publish pay band ranges in job ads.
No flexibility after hire	Flexibility offered to attract the hire, then withdrawn or made difficult to access once in the role.	Document flexibility arrangements formally. Make flexibility part of the role.
Isolation	Being the only woman in a team with no peer group or sponsor relationship.	Connect women to Women in Automotive NZ. Create internal peer communities. Sponsor mentoring.

The 30-60-90 Day Check-In for New Hires

Implement a structured 30-60-90 day check-in for every new hire, conducted by someone other than their direct manager e.g. HR or a senior female staff member.

Ask: How is the culture feeling? Are you getting the support you expected? Are there any concerns you haven't felt able to raise? Do you see a clear career pathway here?

Employees who feel seen and heard in their first 90 days are significantly more likely to still be with you at the 24-month mark. This is an investment, not an administrative task.



08 Your 90 - Day Action Plan

Below is a practical 90 - day plan any employer can implement regardless of size. Actions are sequenced by impact and ease of implementation.

Timeline	Action	Owner	Done?
Week 1 – 2	Run every current job ad through a gender decoder. Rewrite any that score masculine-coded.	HR / Hiring manager	☐
Week 1 – 2	Add explicit diversity invitation to all job ad templates: 'We actively encourage applications from women and underrepresented groups.'	HR	☐
Week 2 – 3	Conduct employer brand audit: website, LinkedIn, social media. Identify top 3 imagery or content gaps.	Marketing / HR	☐
Week 2 – 4	Brief your recruitment agency on the 50% diverse shortlist requirement.	GM / HR	☐
Week 3 – 4	Design a structured interview template with 5 behavioural questions and scoring rubric for your top 3 most-hired roles.	HR	☐
Week 4 – 6	Post all open vacancies on LinkedIn in addition to current channels. Tag in Women in Automotive NZ.	HR	☐
Week 4 – 6	Identify roles that could offer flexible roster options. Update role briefs and job ads to reflect this.	Operations / HR	☐
Month 2	Train all hiring managers: structured interviewing, unlawful questions under NZ Human Rights Act, and unconscious bias.	HR	☐
Month 2 – 3	Introduce 30-60-90 day check-in protocol for all new hires. Assign a check-in owner for each hire.	HR	☐
Month 3	Review recruitment data from past 6 months: application, shortlist, interview, and offer split by gender. Identify where women are dropping out.	HR / GM	☐
Month 3	Set a 12-month gender diversity hiring target and review quarterly. Share with leadership team.	GM / CEO	☐



Resources & Further Reading

Free Tools

- Gender Decoder: gender-decoder.katmatfield.com, free and instant language analysis
- Textio: textio.com, AI-powered job ad language platform (paid)
- Diversity Works NZ Inclusive Recruitment Guide: diversityworks.nz

New Zealand Legislation

- Human Rights Act 1993, prohibited grounds of discrimination in employment
- Employment Relations Act 2000, good faith obligations in recruitment
- Parental Leave and Employment Protection Act 1987 (as amended)
- Pay Equity Act 2020, equal pay for work of equal value

Key Research

- Infometrics and Statistics New Zealand automotive workforce report 2022
- Gaucher, Friesen & Kay, Evidence That Gendered Wording in Job Advertisements Exists and Sustains Gender Inequality (Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 2011)
- McKinsey, Diversity Wins: How Inclusion Matters (2023)
- Schmidt & Hunter, The Validity and Utility of Selection Methods in Personnel Psychology (Psychological Bulletin, 1998)
- Diversity Works NZ, Inclusion@Work Index (annual)

Industry Organisations

- Women in Automotive New Zealand – womeninautomotive.nz
- Diversity Works NZ – diversityworks.nz
- Motor Industry Association NZ – mia.org.nz
- MITO – mito.org.nz



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